





Chopin, Frederic - Recital

A sensitive artist introduces himself

Label/Publisher: Deutsche Grammophon
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Chopin Recital

When the news of the awarding of first prize at the Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 2000 to the then 18-year-old Chinese pianist Yundi Li was announced, it was more than a sensation for the music world. This prize had not been awarded for 15 years and none of the many candidates was considered worthy enough to succeed Martha Argerich or Maurizio Pollini. Now one of probably the youngest participants has received this traditional award.

Who is this pianist who is called the "great hope of the youngest generation of pianists". He comes from Chongqing in central China, received his first piano lessons at the age of seven, and passed the selection process for the upper music school in Sichuan Province at the age of twelve. He moved to Shenzhen in southern China with his teacher at the time, and thanks to numerous prizes and awards he was able to study at the university there without paying tuition fees. These are all stations that are somewhat foreign to a 'Western' cultural establishment. At the age of thirteen he won the Stravinsky Competition and the Gina Bachauer Competition in the USA, was third prize winner at the Franz Liszt Competition in the Netherlands - the music world took notice, Deutsche Grammophon signed an exclusive contract with him and released his debut CD by the artist exclusively with music by Frédéric Chopin.

The selected works belong to the standard repertoire of the great pianists; representatives of all generations have recorded them; for anyone interested in Chopin's piano music, they are practically a part of life like the air we breathe. Anyone who records these works is taking a risk. They are well known and feature big names like Rubinstein, Horowitz, Horowitz and others.

There must be something special about Yundi Li and his playing that has aroused fascination not only among experts. The opening work on this CD, the Sonata No. 3 in B minor, shows a mature and very personal approach from the first bars. It goes without saying that Yundi Li has perfect technique. However, he does not use this to play himself into the foreground, but rather he manages to take the listener into the dreamy world of this composition. His interpretation is characterized by great emotionality, which suits the essence of the sonata. He plays out the smallest dynamic shades, and the melody design is perfect, especially in the slow passages. In the following Andante spianato in G minor and Grande Polonaise in brilliant E flat major it becomes clear that Yundi Li did not receive the first prize for the best polonaise interpretation in Warsaw for nothing. The lyrical, dreamy character is portrayed very well, without succumbing to gallantry. In the polonaise, his elegance is impressive; he plays out the melodic punchlines as well as the rhythmically difficult lines. His interpretation is never harsh or attuned to external effects.

After these two big chunks, the pianist turns his attention to "miniatures". He plays the etudes op.10 no. 2 and 5 as well as op.25 no.11. If you compare these with historical photographs, the proximity to Cortot becomes particularly clear. He allows himself the necessary rest to be able to exploit all facets and is not one of those who sees these works as a 'minute competition'. In his hands the three études sound with clarity and brilliance. Liveliness and joy of playing are defining, but the musical content is always in the foreground.

The following Nocturnes op.9 No.1 and 2 and op.15 No.2 show the great inner peace that Yundi Li conveys to the listener. The grace with which he reproduces the melody of the B minor Nocturne in the respective coloratura is quite remarkable. Likewise the calmness with which he plays the E flat major Nocturne - reminiscent of Rubinstein, whose favorite encore this work was. What great magic Yundi Li's playing conveys, what great drama he can create even in the smallest sections, is shown in the last Nocturne. The term Larghetto is mandatory, but is often neglected in other recent recordings.

The final work, the Fantasy Impromptu No. 4 in C sharp minor, appears as a personal homage. Here the melodic design of the middle part is embedded in a very sound-oriented accompaniment. The fast passages are lively without seeming intrusive. Yundi Li manages to stick strictly to the specifications of the compositions and yet convey a liveliness that puts his interpretation alongside that of other great pianists. We can look forward to his next project, which he dedicated to Franz Liszt. Once again he is being looked after by Deutsche Grammophon, which supplied a very informative, trilingual booklet for his debut CD and whose design of the CD cover was extremely attractive.

Interpretation: ★★★★★
 Sound quality: ★★★★★
 Repertoire value: ★★★★★

Criticism by [Axel Engels](#) , July 14, 2002



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Basic data	factories	Contributors



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